

From women in fisheries to gender and fisheries

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Introduction

Women's issues loomed large on social and political agendas in the 1960s, and entered the development agenda in the late 1960s and 1970s when several international aid agencies recognised that the failure of many of their developmental projects was due to the exclusion of women in the design and implementation of projects. Even though women play important roles and contribute significantly to the impact and sustainability of development projects, their contribution to society was often undervalued and unappreciated. Earlier initiatives emphasised women in the development context, of which, women in fisheries is a particular case because initially, the immediate goal was to ensure women's involvement and their integration into development programmes from which they were denied active participation in the past (Ostergaard 1992).

Since the 1975 United Nations World Conference on Women held in Mexico City, a series of international conferences and events has helped sustain the focus on women's involvement (see Table 1). In the fisheries sector of development, the first major event was the Global Workshop on Aquaculture, held in 1987, almost eight years before the Workshop on Women in Fisheries in the Asia-Pacific region, which was organised as a prelude to the Fourth World Conference on Women.

Development agencies, however, recognised that targeting women as special beneficiaries could be counterproductive or at least insufficient to improve their contributions to and benefits from development. An intermediate step in development thinking was, therefore, to consider the changes needed in the development agenda to better incorporate women and, thus, the focus switched to "women and development". This change in focus, however, was found to be too narrow and programmes emphasising women and development ran the risk of alienating men, and simplifying the complex roles of men and women in the community. From about 1995, programmes began recognising that success in development depends on the community and the interrelationship between all of the people in it, not just on women or men, which gave rise to "gender" programmes rather than "women's programs" (Levy 1996).

Gender, which is constructed socially, is defined as the relationship between men and women. Biological characteristics are not significant. Gender roles of women and men are defined by society, and vary among different societies and cultures, classes and ages, and may change through history. Development activities can only be made sustainable by changing overall structural factors such as rules and practices of a household, community, market and state, which sustain women's subordinate roles in society.

Table 1. Chronology of events related to women in development.

Date	Event
1975	United Nations World Conference on Women (Mexico)
1975–1985	United Nations Decade for Women
1980	Second World Conference on Women (Denmark)
1985	Third World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women (Kenya)
1987	United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization Global Workshop on Women in Aquaculture (Italy)
1995	Workshop on Women in Fisheries in the Asia-Pacific region (Philippines)
1995	Fourth World Conference on Women (People's Republic of China)
2000	Beijing +5: Women 2000 — Gender, Equality, Development and Peace for the 21 st Century — Special Session of the General Assembly (United States of America)

¹ ICLARM — The World Fish Center, Malaysia; in 2001.

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This paper documents the sequence of events beginning with the involvement of the Asian Fisheries Society (AFS) in the Women in Fisheries programme to the move towards Gender and Fisheries (GAF) initiatives. Some gender issues besetting the fisheries (including aquaculture) sector — and the challenges to uplift the status of women in line with the blueprint from the Beijing Platform for Action — are also discussed.

The evolution of Women in Fisheries symposia

In 1994, the Partnerships for Development in Kampuchea held a very successful “National Symposium on WIF in Cambodia” (Nandeesh and Heng 1994). A “Regional Seminar on WIF in Indo-China Countries” followed this in 1996 (Nandeesh and Honglomong 1997). The Indo-China regional seminar called for urgent attention to be directed at gender issues in the fisheries sector, and suggested that the issues be followed up at the full Asian regional level. Participants in this seminar identified AFS and ICLARM as the most suitable institutions to stimulate this effort. Subsequently, AFS held two very successful symposia: International Symposium on Women in Asian Fisheries in 1998 in Chiang Mai (Williams et al. 2001) and the Global Symposium on Women in Fisheries in 2001 in Kaoshiung. These two symposia attracted many participants, and highlighted the involvement of women in fisheries activities and in many instances the multiple roles of women and their need to contribute to the family income in poverty-stricken households. Although these two symposia were specifically on women’s roles, gender issues were often raised by participants. Examples include the social relations among men, women and children in the sapyaw fishery in the Philippines (Sotto et al. 2001) and the HIV/AIDS issue among fishers and the vulnerability of their partners (Huang 2002).

The fisheries sector in developing countries is recognised as one of the most economically depressed sectors in society. The two AFS symposia and their precursors brought home several messages: women (wives or daughters) from fisher households in Southeast Asia, Africa and Latin America actually fish and take part in many other fisheries sector activities and are often depicted as:

- over worked, with their contribution unrecognised, unvalued or under valued;
- poorly paid and exploited by employers;
- illiterate;
- undernourished and sickly, with poor productivity; and
- lack opportunities for skills upgrading and access to training.

Although a substantial number of women are involved in technical professions, the number of women holding managerial posts with decision-making powers is insignificant. Chao and Liao (2001) noted that most women in technical professions in Taiwan have low self-esteem and this probably applied to women elsewhere. Primavera and Bueno (2001) suggested that this perception could reflect social values that hold men superior. In some countries, women do not have the basic rights (e.g. the right to vote, choice of career, and even dress) that many women from developed countries take for granted.

Merely involving women in development programmes without delving into issues of culture and the state will not contribute to sustainable development and will not correct the disparities between the sexes, hence there is a need to consider gender.

Gender and fisheries. The symposia held to date have given general overviews and highlighted some specific women’s issues in the fisheries sector. However, they do little more than start to raise awareness of the issues, and barely permit a glance at what might be the key gender issues. The time is ripe for key gender issues to be drawn out; the co-convenors of and participants in the latest symposium believe that this is the logical next step. Even at this point, some gender issues begin to emerge from the papers and discussions. A few are highlighted here.

Poverty. In the fisheries sector, widespread poverty is among the most pressing issues, especially among traditional fishers trying to make a living from the paltry catches of over-exploited waters. Policy changes and better management are called for to change this condition. A range of problems, many pertaining to gender dimensions, accompany the poverty of many fishing families and communities (Binkley 1995; FAO 1995a; Gittinger 1990; Neis 1996; Williams 1996; Williams and Awoyomi 1998).

Division of household labour. Household labor studies have shown that women with dual working roles consistently spend two or three hours a day (every day) more than men doing work-related activities (Levine et al. 2001). Malnourishment and long working hours may have sociological, economic and health implications for women (FAO 1990, 1995b; IFPRI 1995; Tully 1990; Quisumbing et al. 1995).

Health. One of the greatest health challenges confronting the fishers and their families may become HIV/AIDS. Fishers appear to be particularly vulnerable because of their ignorance of the disease and the time spent away from their families. Access to affordable treatment and education on safe sex is,

therefore, imperative for both the fishers and their wives, and the latter must be aware of their rights to protect themselves.

Access to education and other rights

Access to general education is often denied to children, especially girls, from fishing families.

Other issues include violence, recognised as the key factor preventing women from exercising their rights (AusAID 1997), and lack of credit and decision-making opportunities for women. Community-based fisheries management programmes involving the participation of both men and women may be a platform that provides women the opportunities to actively involve themselves in the decision-making process; therefore, these programmes and the gender elements of them should be actively promoted (Jallow 1997; Williams 1997; CGIAR News 2002).

Organisational culture

Gender issues are generally undertaken from a community angle with interventions directed to promote an egalitarian relationship between men and women. To enhance gender equity, gender mainstreaming within the delivery organisations should be applied as well as the use of the gender analysis framework for development projects. At CARE Bangladesh, efforts were made to establish gender equity within the organisation, and to increase staff awareness of gender issues (Debashish et al. 2001). Actions adopted by CARE Bangladesh to improve gender equity include:

- creating a working environment for women that is free from discrimination and harassment;
- increasing the number of women in the workforce, especially in senior positions, to achieve a more equal gender balance;
- providing training and counselling to staff to overcome gender barriers;
- providing advice and assistance for planning, implementation and monitoring of gender sensitive projects; and
- bringing forward new ideas about gender equality. The gender analysis framework is generally used as a tool for collecting and analysing gender disaggregated data at all stages of a project. The use of this tool makes it possible to better understand the gender factor in many development projects, and to develop mechanisms for gender mainstreaming.

Raising awareness and sharing knowledge

One of the first actions needed to redress gender inequities is to increase awareness of gender issues and to dispel perceptions that women are weak and

helpless. Sebastian Junger (1998) in his book "The Perfect Storm" recognised Linda Greenlaw as "one of the best sea captains, period, on the East Coast". Greenlaw said of herself: "I never anticipated problems stemming from being female, and never encountered any" (Greenlaw 1999).

The AFS, together with ICLARM-The World Fish Center, plan to give more coverage to gender issues through the ICLARM quarterly magazine NAGA, and to encourage networking through a list server to link interest groups on gender issues. ICLARM-The World Fish Center, which practices gender-sensitive policies, strives to ensure that all programmes have taken into consideration gender issues in the project and programme formulation phase. The World Fish Center will actively develop more projects involving gender, and seek funding for these studies.

Challenges and conclusion

According to Madeline Albright, a former US Secretary of State, the biggest challenge to the 21st century will undoubtedly be the conferment of basic human rights to women, and of all the forces that will shape the world, the movement to recognise and realise the rights of women will be the most powerful (USAID 2000). Use of the GAD approach to solve gender issues will require the adoption of a gender analysis framework that seeks to understand the inequities in the historical, political and cultural situation between men and women and the processes that reinforce these imbalances (Itzin and Newman 1995).

These imbalances remain formidable. The 1995 UNDP Human Development Report on the status of women (UNDP 1995) indicated that:

- 70% of the 1.3 billion people living in poverty are women;
- among the world's 900 million illiterate people, women outnumber men two to one;
- more women than men are malnourished;
- in many poor countries, pregnancy complications are the largest single cause of death among women in their reproductive years;
- women's wages are 30–40% less than for men doing comparable work; and
- women constitute less than one-seventh of administrators and managers in developing countries.

Women hold only 10% of the seats in the world's parliaments and 6% in national cabinets. Sustainable development cannot occur without equal opportunities for women in the economic, social and political spheres (Young 1993). However,

the lack of unbiased gender data on the nature and role of men's and women's contributions, especially from developing countries, may hinder the actions taken to address critical problem areas identified in the Beijing Platform for Action. Research and research organisations have a role to play in guiding the action although to fulfill this role they will need to do the following:

- develop research and gender analysis methodologies;
- collect unbiased, disaggregated gender data;
- help formulate fair policies, programmes and legislation;
- provide training to assist scientists and development specialists in research and programme implementation;
- develop sustainable institutional frameworks for gender mainstreaming;
- sustain continuity in gender-sensitive development research and strategic interventions; and
- increase gender sensitivity in research and policy design and management.

Through the work of the symposia and related activities reported in these and earlier proceedings, a small but growing group of research and development specialists have begun their commitment to follow this path as part of their contribution to sustainable development in the fisheries sector. Most of us are not women's specialists, gender specialists or even social scientists, but through the prompting of our colleagues, especially Dr M.C. Nandeesh, we have begun to realise the demands for gender equality in all dimensions of our fields.

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